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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether selected elementary teachers, secondary teachers, and administrators felt that their schools and school systems were implementing effective school components within the overall curricula. The major effective school components were academics, teacher collaboration, and discipline policy. The 116 respondents completed a survey that focused on those three components. Each survey included six primary questions related to the effective school setting. Data analysis indicated that 50 percent or more of the respondents perceived that their school systems were creating effective school programs and implementing them at all levels. Most did not differ greatly in their opinions concerning effective school programs within their school systems. Respondents reported that school systems were implementing effective school programs at all levels. They believed that their school systems were striving to create effective school programs with autonomy and teacher involvement in educational decisions as well as expectations that all students can achieve at high levels. Most respondents felt their school systems had effective curricula in place to address the diverse needs of students. Respondents indicated that teacher collaboration within the schools and school systems does occur, though not always appropriately. Effective discipline policies were in place in the schools and involved input from teachers, students, and the community. (Contains 37 references.) (SM)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ACADEMIC CURRICULUM, TEACHER COLLABORATION, AND DISCIPLINE POLICY AMONG SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE STATE OF ALABAMA

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ACADEMIC CURRICULUM, TEACHER COLLABORATION, AND DISCIPLINE POLICY AMONG SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE STATE OF ALABAMA

As the year 2000 approaches, the importance of educating all of the children appropriately has become a crucial factor instead of a hypothetical theory. The realization has hit home to many educators that not only are schools to provide suitable education, but that students must be exposed to more challenging standards which will prepare them for college and the workplace (e.g., Sanacore, 1997; Camoran & Weinstein, 1995; Stevens & Slavin, 1995). Research indicates that there will be many jobs available for young people in the year 2000, but many of these positions will require educational training beyond that of an high school diploma ("Tomorrow's Job," 1996, p. 1). As a result of such findings, restructuring schools has become a serious issue in education.

Educators question the effects of ability grouping or tracking on today's youth and are searching for alternatives to counteract the negative side-effects which have become obvious over the years (Calderon, 1990; Slavin, 1990; Sanacore, 1997). These side-effects include social misbehaviors which promote violence, school failure, and dropouts (Elias, 1998; Krajewski, Martinez, & Polka,1998). Therefore, because the schools are extensions of society, it has become the school's responsibility to address certain social needs of children which will be beneficial for them later on in life. These needs must be addressed because the nation's declining economic competitiveness and the diverse needs of the growing poor and miniority populations

have created increased concern about our schools' ability to educate all of the students (French and Rothman, 1990, p. 1).

Although these needs imply essential changes within the school, it has been argued that large-scale reform requires highly specific, systemic, and structural methodologies with supporting materials of tremendously high quality (Pogrow, 1996, p. 51). Schools must design programs which will benefit society as well as the individual child, but even after schools have designed strategies and plans to promote effective schooling, state and local officials of public agencies will be the ones to determine what will be accepted or rejected, for the content of the curriculum is influenced by priorities of state and federal governments values of professional educators and local community, knowledge of student development, current economics, and future societal conditions (Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon, 1995, p. 374). Therefore, Meriwether (1996) warns that decisions made locally that do not enjoy budgeting consideration at the local level because of a lack of funds are likely to be ineffective, and the school administrator's role under certain circumstances is that of a budget manager (p. 4). So, he she has to juggle financial business with that of an effective leader.

The purpose of this study was to determine and analyze studies pertaining to the characteristics of effective schools, and to use survey results collected and compiled data to determine if Alabama school systems are implementing effective schools programs at the elementary and secondary school levels.

The primary objectives of this study were to determine if selected elementary school teachers, secondary school teachers, and administrators felt that their schools

and school systems were implementing effective school components within the overall curricula. The major effective school components were academics, teacher collaboration, and discipline policy (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1995; Miller, 1993; Ubben & Hughes, 1992; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995). More specifically, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. What is the extent to which school systems in the state of Alabama have implemented effective school programs which provide autonomy as well as teacher involvement in educational decisions and in which teachers and administrators exhibit expectations that all students can achieve at high levels?

2. Do teachers feel that their schools have curricula in place which are well-planned and coordinated to address the diverse needs of all student groups which promote school-wide recognition and academic success among all students?

3. Do collaborative planning and collegial relationships exist among teachers within schools and throughout the school systems among teachers in the same district?

4. Do the implemented discipline policies which were designed to provide safe, orderly climate for learning and positive relationships between home and school include the involvement of teachers, students, and community?

Method

This study was a descriptive study designed to identify and determine if school systems were implementing effective school programs at all levels in the state of Alabama. The study was limited to 116 elementary teachers, secondary teachers,

and administrators. A precentage for each item was presented to determine if schools demonstrated a difference in one or more areas of the surveyed effective school components: academics, collaboration, and discipline. These components were defined as major factors in the development of an effective school setting (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1995; Miller, 1993; Ubben & Hughes, 1992; Weinsten, Madison, Kuklinski, 1995). The researcher also sought to determine if the foregoing variables differed with respect to the school levels as well. To determine the difference between school levels, the participants' responses were divided between elementary and secondary levels. At this point, responses to each item in the survey were determined to give the percentage of elementary and secondary school teachers reponses. Although there were seven participating administrators, the percentage of participation for these educators was given, too.

Instrument

The survey was divided into three sub-groups: academics, collaboration, and discipline. This survey was a replica of a survey used in a study entitled The School as Center of Inquiry: An Action Research by Marium Williams (1995) to analyze effective school in the state of Kentucky. Each participant was asked to indicate whether he/she taught on the elementary or secondary level, if the school was private or public, and to give the name of the school system or county. Administrative participants were asked to do the same. Each survey consisted of six primary questions which were related to the effective school setting. The participants responded whether they (5) strongly agree; (4) agree; (3) undecided; (2) disagree; or (1) strongly disagree.

Results

The results from the survey were compiled, and the percentage for the five responses of each question was determined. An analysis of the difference between each level was done as well. The five choices of responses were (5)strongly agree; (4)agree; (3)undecided; (2)disagree; and (1)strongly disagree.

Research Question 1: What is the extent to which school systems in the state of Alabama have implemented effective school programs (academics, collaboration, and discipline policy) which will provide autonomy as well as involvement in educational decisions and in which teachers and administrators exhibit expectations that all students can achieve at high levels?

As indicated in table 1, a total of 116 educators participated in the survey conducted during the week of July 13-17, 1998. Fifty-six of the participants were elementary teachers, 53 were secondary school teachers, and 7 were school administrators. The survey consisted of three major components: academics, collaboration, and discipline policy. In order to determine if participants thought that their schools and school systems were striving to implement effective school programs, a total count for each response and non-response was calculated. Then, the percentage from each total response from all items listed on the survey was determined. At this point, the researcher sought to find if at least 60% of the educators, for each response, agreed that the effective school variables listed for each major component were actually a part of their schools' and school systems' curricula. In table one

of the 116 educators surveyed, 33% strongly agreed that their school systems were implementing effective school programs into the curricula, 41% agreed, 16% were undecided, 8% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. Two percent did not respond. For academics, 74% of the educators agreed that their school systems were creating academic plans which consisted of a well-planned and coordinate curriculum, intellectually challenging instruction, and clear goals with high expectations. For collaboration, 18% strongly agreed that collaboration was effectively incorporated in their school systems, 33 % agreed, 25% were undecided, 15% disagreed, and 7 % strongly disagreed. Two percent did not respond (see Table 2). When considering a discipline policy which included the involvement of teachers, students, and the community, 21% of the participants strongly agreed that the overall discipline policies were effective, 32% agreed, 17% were undecided, 20% disagreed, and 8% strongly disagreed. Less than two percent of the educators did not respond (see Table 3).

Thus, for the participants surveyed, the majority felt that their school systems were creating effective school programs which produced effective academic curricula. On the other hand, less than 50% of the participants indicated that collaboration was effective in their school systems which was far less than the academic curricula. However, the responses to the discipline policy showed that more than 50% of the participants felt that the discipline policies for their schools and school systems were effective.

Research Question 2: Do teachers feel that their schools have curricula which are well-planned and coordinated to address the diverse academic needs of student groups which promote school-wide recognition and academic success?

Table 4 gives the results of how teachers and administrators perceived the academic curricula in their schools and school systems. During this analyzation, there was a distinction in the responses between elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers. As far as academics were concerned, 74% of the educators agreed that their schools had well planned and coordinated curricula

Table One
Academics

	Number of Responses						
Items	SA 5	A 4	UND 3	D 2	SD 1	No Responses	Total
1.	48	49	15	4	0	0	116
2.	33	58	19	5	1	1	116
3.	50	44	15	7	0	0	116
4.	45	40	22	7	1	1	116
5.	33	58	16	6	3	0	116
6.	19	38	27	26	6	0	116
Total	228	287	114	55	11	2	696
Total Percentage	33%	41%	16%	8%	2%	0%	100%

5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree

Table Two

Collaboration

	Number of Responses						
	SA 5	A 4	UN 3	D 2	SD 1	No Response	Total
1.	19	44	32	18	3	0	116
2.	17	39	26	24	5	5	116
3.	19	39	24	20	13	1	116
4.	27	41	24	10	9	5	116
5.	28	41	37	7	2	1	116
6.	12	27	32	28	16	1	116
Total	122	231	175	107	48	13	696
Total Percentage	18%	33%	25%	15%	7%	2%	100%

5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree

(For survey statements, see appendix A)

Table Three
Discipline

Items	Number of Responses SA 5	A 4	UND 2	SD 3	D 2	No Responses	Total
1.	44	44	11	15	1	1	116
2.	29	46	20	15	5	1	116
3.	11	31	23	35	15	1	116
4.	14	27	26	29	17	3	116
Total	98	148	80	94	38	6	464
Total Percentage	21%	32%	17%	20%	8%	2% *	100%
5.	37	41	13	5	17	3	116
Total	37	41	13	5	17	3	116
Total Percentage	32%	35%	11%	4%	15%	3%	100%
6. a.	46	45	19	3	1	2	116
b.	20	45	18	15	12	5	116
c.	30	39	18	12	12	5	116
d.	21	23	17	15	32	8	116
Total	117	152	72	45	57	21	464
Percentage	25%	33%	16%	10%	12%	4%	100%

5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree
* = Less than 2 percent

(42% elementary and 39% secondary). Eighty percent agreed that the curricula focused on intellectually challenging instruction (43% elementary and 32% secondary). Eighty-three percent responded that there are clear goals and high expectations for students, faculty, staff, and administration (43% elementary and 35% secondary). Seventy-four percent indicated that there was school wide recognition of academic success (42% elementary and 27% secondary). Seventy-eight percent of the participants indicated that in their schools alternative teaching strategies were provided to students having difficulty (43% elementary and 33% secondary). Forty-nine percent indicated that parents were involved in the academic success of students (31% elementary and 15% secondary).

Research Question 3: Do collaborative planning and colleagial relationships exist among teachers within the schools and throughout the school systems among teachers in the same district?

As schools encounter diverse student groups, teachers have to prepare themselves to meet the needs of these students. Collaboration among teachers has become an effective tool in getting faculty members to work together. Table five presents the reponses of the 56 elementary school teachers, the 53 secondary school teachers, and the 7 administrators to collaboration in the selected schools. In the survey, 54% of the teachers and administrators agreed that collaboration is in place among all teachers (25% elementary and 26% secondary). Fifty percent agreed that

Table Four
Academics

Questions	Number of Responses 5	4	3	2	1	No Response	Total
1. Your school has a well planned coordinated curriculum.	42%	44%	13%	1%	0%	0%	100%
Elementary	28%	14%	6%	0%	0%	0%	
Secondary	11%	28%	6%	1%	0%	0%	
Adminstration	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	
2. The curriculum focuses on intellectually challenging instruction.	30%	50%	16%	3%	1%	0%	100%
Elementary	24%	19%	4%	1%	0%	0%	
Secondary	6%	27%	11%	2%	0%	0%	
Administration	0%	4%	1%	0%	1%	0%	
3. There are clear goals and high expectations for students, faculty, staff, and administration.	45%	38%	13%	4%	0%	0%	100%
Elementary	28%	15%	3%	2%	0%	0%	
Secondary	16%	19%	9%	2%	0%	0%	
Administration	1%	4%	1%	0%	0%	0%	
4. There is school-wide recognition of academic success.	40%	34%	19%	6%	0%	1%	100%
Elementary	24%	18%	4%	1%	0%	1%	
Secondary	14%	13%	14%	5%	0%	0%	
Administration	2%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	
5. Alternative teaching strategies are provided to students having difficulty mastering a task.	28%	50%	18%	3%	1%	0%	100%

Elementary	18%	25%	3%	1%	1%	0%	
Secondary	8%	23%	13%	2%	0%	0%	
Administration	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	
6. Parents are involved in the academic success of students.	16%	33%	24%	22%	5%	0%	100%
Elementary	9%	22%	9%	4%	4%	0%	
Secondary	6%	9%	13%	17%	1%	0%	
Administration	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	
Total Percentage	33%	41%	16%	8%	2%	1%	100%

Title I and regular classroom teachers collaborated (27% elementary and 18% secondary). Fifty-two percent of the educators responded that they have common planning time at regular intervals (29% elementary and 19% secondary). Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that Title I teachers and classroom teachers were equally responsible for students' learning, time investment, and accountability. Fifty-nine percent of the participants indicated that teachers felt that collaboration is an effective means of teaching (27% elementary and 27% secondary). The survey results on district-wide collaboration indicated that 34% of the teachers and administrators felt that teachers across the district are given time to collaborate with other teachers working in the same areas (14 % elementary and 17% secondary).

A total of 51% of the educators thought collaboration was in place in their schools; however, collaboration between Title I and regular classroom teachers was less than 50%. Plus, collaboration among teachers across the system was

a mere 34% which indicated that collaboration among schools within the districts was lacking.

Research Question 4: Did the implemented discipline policies which were to provide safe, orderly climates for learning and positive relationships between home and school included the involvement of teachers, students, and community?

Discipline was another major component listed as an effective school characteristic, and responses to this area were listed in table six. In this survey, 76% of the educators perceived their school-wide discipline policies as effective

Table Five

Collaboration

Questions	Number of Responses 5	4	3	2	1	No Responses	Total
1. Collaboration is in place among all teachers.	16%	38%	28%	16%	1%	1%	100%
Elementary	10%	15%	13%	8%	1%	1%	
Secondary	5%	21%	13%	7%	0%	0%	
Administration	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	
2. Title I and regular classroom teachers collaborate.	16%	34%	23%	21%	3%	3%	100%
Elementary	10%	17%	8%	9%	2%	2%	
Secondary	5%	15%	13%	11%	1%	1%	
Administration	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	

3. Common planning times are set aside at regular intervals for collaborating teachers.	16%	36%	17%	19%	11%	1%	100%
Elementary	10%	19%	6%	6%	7%	0%	
Secondary	5%	14%	10%	11%	4%	1%	
Administration	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	
4. Title I and regular education teachers are equally responsible for student learning, time investment, and accountability.	24%	36%	20%	8%	7%	5%	100%
Elementary	16%	15%	10%	1%	4%	2%	
Secondary	7%	18%	9%	6%	3%	3%	
Administration	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	
5. Collaborating teachers feel that collaboration is an effective means of teaching.	24%	35%	33%	7%	0%	1%	100%
Elementary	17%	10%	16%	5%	0%	0%	
Secondary	6%	21%	16%	2%	0%	1%	
Administration	1%	4%	1%	0%	0%	0%	
6. Teachers across the district are given time to collaborate with others teachers working in the same areas.	10%	24%	28%	24%	14%	1%	100%
Elementary	6%	8%	11%	13%	9%	1%	
Secondary	4%	13%	15%	10%	5%	0%	
Administration	0%	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%	
Total Percentage	18%	33%	25%	15%	7%	2%	100%

(43% elementary and 29% secondary). Sixty-four percent thought that teachers were effectively involved in developing those policies (32% elementary and 28%

secondary). However, only 36% indicated that students have an effective voice in developing discipline policies (20% elementary and and 14% secondary), and 36%, of the participants, perceived that the community had an effective voice in developing discipline policies (19% elementary and 13% secondary). On the other hand, 67% of the educators indicated that their schools used corporal punishment (34% elementary and 29% secondary).

Most of the educators favored classroom rules, detention, and in-school suspension as effective forms of punishment. Seventy-nine percent favored classroom rules (40% elementary and 34% secondary). Fifty-six percent felt that detention was an effective form of punishment (25% elementary and 30% secondary), and 60% of them selected in-school suspension (26% elementary and 34% secondary). However, most of the participants did not favor Saturday school, for only 38% choose Saturday school as an effective form of punishment (13% elementary and 23% secondary).

The results from the survey on discipline indicated that more elementary school teachers felt their school systems had effective discipline policies. However, 67% indicated that corporal punishment still existed in their school systems along with the alternative forms of punishment.

Table Six
Discipline

Questions	Number of Responses 5	4	3	2	1	No Responses	Total
1. Your school has an effective school-wide discipline policy.	38%	38%	10%	13%	1%	0%	100%
Elementary	21%	22%	2%	3%	0%	0%	
Secondary	16%	13%	7%	9%	1%	0%	
Administration	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	
2. Teachers have an effective voice in developing discipline policy.	25%	39%	19%	13%	3%	1%	100%
Elementary	15%	17%	9%	5%	2%	0%	
Secondary	9%	19%	9%	7%	1%	1%	
Administration	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	
3. Students have an effective voice in developing discipline policy.	9%	27%	20%	30%	13%	10%	100%
Elementary	5%	15%	9%	12%	7%	0%	
Secondary	4%	10%	8%	17%	6%	1%	
Administration	0%	2%	3%	1%	0%	0%	
4. Community has an effective voice developing discipline policy.	12%	24%	23%	25%	14%	2%	100%
Elementary	5%	14%	10%	11%	6%	2%	
Secondary	6%	7%	12%	13%	8%	0%	
Administration	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	
Total Percentage	21%	33%	17%	20%	8%	1%	100%

5. Your school uses corporal punishment.	32%	35%	11%	5%	14%	3%	100%
Elementary	17%	18%	6%	2%	3%	2%	
Secondary	12%	15%	4%	3%	11%	1%	
Administration	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	
6. Rate each of the following insofar as an effective for of punishment:							
a. Classroom rules	40%	39%	16%	4%	1%	0%	
Elementary	21%	19%	6%	2%	0%	0%	
Secondary	17%	17%	10%	1%	1%	0%	
Administration	2%	3%	0%	1%	0%	0%	
b. Detention	17%	39%	16%	13%	10%	5%	
Elementary	9%	16%	9%	6%	5%	3%	
Secondary	8%	22%	6%	3%	5%	2%	
Administration	0%	1%	1%	4%	0%	0%	
c. In-school suspension	26%	34%	16%	9%	10%	4%	
Elementary	9%	17%	8%	3%	8%	3%	
Secondary	15%	16%	6%	5%	3%	1%	
Administration	2%	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%	
d. Saturday school	18%	20%	15%	13%	27%	7%	
Elementary	7%	6%	7%	9%	15%	4%	
Secondary	10%	13%	6%	4%	10%	3%	
Administration	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	0%	
Total Precentage	25%	33%	16%	10%	12%	4%	100%

The results from the survey on discipline indicated that more elementary school teachers indicated that their school systems had effective discipline policies although most of the secondary teachers indicated that effective discipline policies existed in their system too. Sixty-seven percent of the participants acknowledged that punishment existed in their school systems along with other forms of alternative punishment.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data collected indicated that 50% or more of the educators surveyed perceived that their school systems were creating effective school programs and implementing them at all levels. The data also implicated that the majority of the elementary and secondary school teachers do not differ greatly in their opinions concerning effective school programs within their school systems, for at least half of them acknowledged that their school systems included the following three major effective school components to the overall curriculum: academics, collaboration, and discipline policy.

The analysis of the data indicated that school systems within the state of Alabama are implementing effective school programs at all levels; however, the data gathered was limited to only 116 participants from twelve counties within the state. The results of Research Question 1 indicated that the selected educators felt that their school systems within the state of Alabama are striving to create effective school programs which will provide autonomy as well as teacher involvement in educational decisions in addition to expectations that all students can achieve at high levels.

An overwhelming number of educators surveyed felt that their school systems have effective curricula in place to address the diverse academic needs of student groups, but there were others who disagreed indicating that improvement is still needed (Research Question 2). The results of Research Question 3 indicated that collaboration among teachers within the schools and school systems do take place although an equal number of educators expressed that there is not appropriate collaboration or they simply did not know. The results of Research Question 4 indicated that effective discipline policies are in place within the school settings which involved the input of teachers, students, and the community in the development of these plans.

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